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->From the Editor's Keyboard "Saying it like it is!"
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Well, even with all that's been going on this week, I find myself with not a lot to say this week. So, rather than talking about the battle over the economic "bailout" elevator, or politics (I didn't watch the vice presidential candidates debate), or even the dismal two losses by my Chicago Cubs (in a 100-year World Series victory drought!). It's also been a long week at the golf course, doing some annual autumn clean-up projects. So, rather than discuss any of the above, or other serious topics, let's just get right to this week's issue; I don't anticipate any major levels of improvement in the world right away, anyway!

Until next time...

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PEOPLE ARE TALKING
compiled by Joe Mirando
joe@atarinews.org

Hidi ho friends and neighbors. Well, if you watched the Vice Presidential Debate the other day, you're probably thinking, like I am, that it's going to be an interesting month or so. That's all I'm going to say on the subject of politics this week, except that, if you haven't been watching the debates, you're not only missing a chance to gather data that'll help you make a decision, you're missing a chance to learn stuff too. Not just stuff about the government, but about people in general. It's amazing to me that two people can listen to the same debate and come away with two completely different opinions about who 'won'.

Okay, I've said enough on the subject for this week. I promised myself I was going to take a break from it this week. So I guess I kind of half-way kept my word to myself. [grin]

Okay, let's take a look at what's been going on in with the UseNet for the past couple of weeks, huh?

From the comp.sys.atari.st NewsGroup
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Mitchell Spector asks about an old demo from way back:

"Way back in 1987, I remember seeing a demo produced
by Atari themselves for showing off the ST series in stores.
Basically it was a reflective metallic ball rolling over a flat
surface covered in Atari logos. I vaguely remember the
ball moving side to side as it rolled, or at least spinning.

Anyone know the name of this demo, and if it's available
for download? I'd love to see it again all these years later!"

Ronald Hall tells Mitchell:

"Hmm, you sure it wasn't multiple balls? That makes me think of Xanths
"Shiny Bubbles" demo. You could use the keyboard to control it - for
example, increase/decrease the speed, start/stop/pause, etc,...

I'm pretty sure I've got that in the files section on my BBS (The
DarkForce BBS/www.darkforce.org) - if you want, send me an e-mail and
I'll try to get it to you."

Mitchell tells Ronald:

"Ahh, sounds very much like it! My memory was a bit fuzzy, it was
21 years ago that I last saw it--on display at a local Compucentre, next
to an Amiga and Apple IIgs. It wasn't one ball going side to side, it
was multiple balls! (and it was the "Atari" name on the surface, not
logo).

Did a quick search, the demo was released in 1987, same year I saw it on
display so chances are good that's it!

Found it and downloaded it already (using a program called
Floppy Image & File Transfer 0.97 to get it over to the ST). Yep,
awesome, definitely the same demo! I'm sure there are much
more interesting things to look at, but I just had to see this again
for a bit of a nostalgic flashback!

Just finally getting a chance to explore the Atari ST all these
years later, it's an pretty interesting machine and more capable
than I originally thought!"

Mitchell now asks about ROM chips for his STf:

"Just received an Atari 1040 STf over the weekend, with the catch
being the previous owner mixed up the six ROM chips and put them
in random sockets! I'm trying to figure out which sockets each chip
plugs back into to resurrect the machine.

The sockets are labeled: U2, U3, U4, U5, U6 and U7

The (version 1.02?) ROM chips are labeled:

- C026160-001

- C026161-001
- C026162-001
- C026163-001
- C026164-001
- C026165-001

I tried the most logical thing and put the lowest number in the lowest socket (i.e. 60=U2, 61=U3, 62, U4, etc) but it just powers up to a white screen and the floppy drive won't load. He also included the 1.04 ROMs but I haven't tried installing those yet.

Interesting, on a side topic, it looks like someone modded this. There's 3 phone 1/4" audio plugs drilled into the back with wires leading to the motherboard (best guess, it tapped into the AY-3812 sound chip?). Also a toggle switch next to the floppy drive, with the wire leading to the far end of the floppy ribbon cable (something around pin number 47 or 48 I guess). I wonder if it overrides the write-protect mechanism or helped by-pass copy protection. :)

Oh, got an SC-1224 monitor with it, and a "Monitor Master" switch box, but it doesn't seem to work as a stand alone video adapter for composite out to a TV. Passed up a monochrome Atari monitor which is getting thrown out if I don't take it, just on the fence if I should get it or not. I know it's needed to do 640x400 modes but I just don't have the room for more CRT's. The color screen is rather nice, I'd swear it uses the same picture tube as my old Apple IIGS monitor (nice deep blacks and color saturation!)."

Robert Schaffner swoops in to save the day by telling Mitchell:

"CO26160   ST U.S. TOS 1.0 256K (H2) ROM
 CO26161   ST U.S. TOS 1.0 256K (H1) ROM
 CO26162   ST U.S. TOS 1.0 256K (H0) ROM
 CO26163   ST U.S. TOS 1.0 256K (L2) ROM
 CO26164   ST U.S. TOS 1.0 256K (L1) ROM
 CO26165   ST U.S. TOS 1.0 256K (L0) ROM "

Mitchell tells Robert:

"So these are 1.00 versions of the firmware? That's definitely interesting to know, but that still doesn't help me as far as which sockets they plug into. Then again, if H2=[U2], H1=[U3], etc, then I had them in the right sockets after all.

Did some searching and found this link:
http://tinyurl.com/3ek4ks (URL modified by Editor)

According the photo (http://www.galaxyzone.net/images/DSC01537.JPG) I have the ROMs plugged into the right sockets. I also tried the order listed down the page, in the white box marked "code: select all". Just get the same results, a white screen, no audio and no floppy activity. Getting a bit desperate, I plugged in the 1.04 ROM chips, using the order shown on the same link and that didn't work either.

I'm beginning to think this Atari ST is dead, despite what the seller claimed. That would be disappointing, but it wouldn't be a total loss as I did get a working SC1224 monitor, 3 boxes of copied disks, a

video switch box, mouse and a perfect condition keyboard.

Is it possible the guide I used is wrong for the ROMs? Do they plug into different sockets than what I tried? I hate to throw away a perfectly good Atari ST over mis-socketed chips."

Michael Schwingen asks Mitchell:

"Did you pick it up yourself, or was the unit shipped? Either case, it might be bad contact on one of the PLCC sockets - that was a frequent problem even when the machines were newer. It might help to

- remove the PLCC chips from their sockets (use a PLCC extractor in order not to damage the socket!)

- carefully clean the sides of the PLCC chip pins and the contacts in the socket using a fiber-glass eraser pen

- If that does not fix it, *very* carefully pull the contacts in the (empty) PLCC sockets inwards a tiny bit to increase contact pressure. A very small hook (like a 0204 resistor with one lead bent into a very small, sharp hook) helps."

Mitchell replies:

"[I] picked it up myself, although this was done using a fold up cart and dragging it home by bus and subway. I was fairly careful, though come to think of it, I had to get it down an entire flight of stairs, one push at a time (rather bumpy there!), getting out of the guy's apartment.

Well, I'll be...your solution fixed it! Pulled out my PLCC extractor, cleaned the pin's edges with a Q-tip and rubbing alcohol, firmly resocketed them and viola, it suddenly works!

I think I'm going to stick with my 1040-STfm though. While it does have a damaged RF modulator (hmm, wonder if that's repairable, it prevents me getting composite video!) it has a better quality image. After repairing this 1040-STf and powering it up, I noticed it has faint vertical lines running through the screen, plus the previous owner rewired the audio to a 1/4" audio jack on the back (which is nice but then you can't get audio output from the Atari RGB monitor!).

Now that the 1040-STf is working, I found out the toggle switch on the side does indeed change the internal floppy drive mapping from "A" to "B". Not sure what use that is. Also looks like it has the original 1.00 GEM firmware, I only see a 1985 copyright (whereas my 1040-STfm display 1985, 87). Not sure if I can use the 1.04 ROMs, I seem to remember the motherboard layout being very different last time I opened it. Weird since they're both revision D.

I'll probably give away/trade the 1040-STf, along with the 520-STfm I got several years ago (never really did much with that, since it had only 512K RAM and a 360K floppy)."

Well folks, that's it for this time around. C'mon back next week, same time, same station, and be ready to listen to what they are saying

when...

PEOPLE ARE TALKING

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->In This Week's Gaming Section - New 'Grand Theft Auto" - Cocaine Sales?
"""""""""""""""""""""""""""""""" Games Bring Fresh Attitude to War!
Nintendo Strikes Wii Hotel Deal!
And more!

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->A-ONE's Game Console Industry News - The Latest Gaming News!
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New 'Grand Theft Auto' Makes Cocaine Sales a Game

Earlier this week, news broke that Grand Theft Auto: Chinatown Wars - the forthcoming DS rendition of Rockstar's immensely popular crime series - would feature a drug-selling mini-game, where players could earn money peddling six different kinds of narcotics around town.

Unsurprisingly, this isn't going over very well with anti-drug organizations. GamePolitics reports that in a story by the British tabloid The Sun, a member of the charity Drugsline condemns Rockstar's use of illegal narcotics.

"Anything using drug-dealing as entertainment is sending out the wrong message," said Darren Gold, on behalf of the Drugsline organization. "Glamorization doesn't help our work trying to educate kids of the dangers of substance misuse."

In Chinatown Wars, players will sell weed, cocaine, ecstasy, heroin, acid, and downers. Speaking to Edge magazine (via Pocket Gamer), Rockstar vice president Dan Houser explained why they included this feature in the game. "We wanted to have a drug-dealing mini-game in lots of the GTA games," Houser said. "We played with it a little in Vice City Stories, because it worked really well juxtaposed with the main story. It works well with what GTA is, with driving around the map, and it gives you another thing to think about - another layer or piece of the puzzle to keep you motivated... It does intersect with the main story and things you learn from it work with the story, but it mostly runs on its own."

Whether or not the game will actually glamorize drug-dealing, as Gold suggests, remains to be seen - but based on past GTA games, Rockstar doesn't always go out of their way to emphasize stark consequences for in-game law-breaking. Still, the developer - which is no stranger to

controversy - probably expected this feature to be met with backlash from anti-drug organizations. In fact, they were probably hoping for it. After all, controversy certainly helps get your game in the news, doesn’t it?

’Brothers,’ ’Mercs 2’ Bring Fresh Attitude to War

Is it possible for a video game to express an anti-war viewpoint? After all, most war games revel in jaw-dropping violence, from smoothly executed head shots to massive explosions. When you’re mowing down hordes of aliens in "Halo" or "Gears of War," there isn’t much time to reflect on the futility of the whole enterprise.

Still, amid all the gung-ho mayhem of the modern first-person shooter, there are glimpses of a more pacifist conscience at work. Even last year’s best-seller, "Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare," had some uncomfortably grim moments, including the awful aftermath of a nuclear explosion. And lesser games like "Haze," "Army of Two" and "BlackSite: Area 51" have taken a more cynical, less heroic approach to war and warriors.

For unambiguous, rah-rah patriotism, there’s always the Pentagon-sponsored "America’s Army." And this is still a genre in which high kill counts outweigh any subliminal anti-war messages. If you’re looking for a peaceful video game, go play "Harvest Moon."

* "Brothers in Arms: Hell’s Highway" (Ubisoft, for the Xbox 360, PlayStation 3, $59.99): Even the valiant troops of World War II, the so-called "Good War," have been granted a measure of doubt and anxiety in recent interpretations. The tormented hero of "Saving Private Ryan" seems to be the model; in Ubisoft’s latest "Brothers in Arms" adventure, the sanity of stoic squad leader Matt Baker is occasionally questioned.

"Hell’s Highway" simulates 1944’s Operation Market Garden, an ambitious Allied attempt to secure a corridor through the Nazi-occupied Netherlands. This is a squad-based game, so you not only have to control Baker, you have to give orders to your team members. In a typical scenario, you order your men to lay down suppressive fire while you sneak around the back and take out Germans from behind.

The squad controls take some getting used to, and sometimes your guys don’t respond as smartly as you might like. The missions that Baker tackles solo are more fun if less realistic. Overall, "Hell’s Highway" is a solid, at times stirring installment of a fine series - although, if you’re tired of World War II games, it’s not distinctive enough that it will change your mind. Three stars out of four.

* "Mercenaries 2: World in Flames" (Electronic Arts, for the Xbox 360, PlayStation 3, $59.99): The satirical "Mercenaries" series eschews the heroic approach entirely: Its psychopathic protagonists care far less about duty or honor than they do about money. As a player, the only thing you’ll really care about is blowing stuff up. Remember that horrifying nuclear blast in "Call of Duty 4"? A similar disaster is played for laughs here.

"World in Flames" begins with a straightforward rescue mission, but after your employer tries to kill you it’s all about revenge. And since

your target is now the leader of Venezuela, your goal is essentially to turn the entire country into a parking lot. You have plenty of weapons and vehicles at your disposal, and may even be able to pick up work from oil-hungry countries like the United States and China.

While the large-scale destruction is undeniably exciting, the overall gameplay is disappointing. "World in Flames" is marred by bizarre graphic glitches, repetitive missions and really awful artificial intelligence. The stupidity of your enemies and the near-indestructibility of your own character kill any sense of accomplishment. Two stars.

* "Battlefield: Bad Company" (Electronic Arts, for the Xbox 360, PlayStation 3, $59.99): The fellows in B Company are a bunch of misfits who are essentially doomed to be cannon fodder in a war they don't even understand. After they're abandoned by their own military, the guys discover something else to fight for: gold.

The comedy in "Bad Company" makes for a nice change of pace from previous "Battlefield" titles, although you may get sick of hearing some of the same quips over and over. Unlike "Brothers in Arms," you don't have much control over your squad mates - which is appropriate, given what loose cannons they are.

Since just about everything is destructible, it's fun to just run around making things go kablooey. The firefights get quite exciting and there's a good variety of missions. And while the satire isn't exactly subtle, "Bad Company" is amusingly unpredictable. Three stars.

New Nintendo DS Portable Will Come With Camera

Nintendo's hit DS portable machine will come with a digital camera that will allow players to mix images, scribble on photos and create new faces, the Japanese game maker said Thursday.

The Nintendo DSi will go on sale in Japan on Nov. 1 for 18,900 yen ($180), and will be available overseas next year. Dates and other details for overseas plans will be announced later, President Satoru Iwata said.

Iwata said the revamped DS is meant to be the first camera for children, a means of network-building for older people or a party toy, part of the company's ongoing quest to broaden gaming's popularity.

One in six Japanese already owns a DS, according to Kyoto-based Nintendo, which also makes Pokemon and Super Mario games. But the goal is to make the DS a must-have for every Japanese, Iwata said.

The new DSi is thinner than the current DS model, and will have a bigger screen, he said. The machine also comes with an audio player, to play sound stored in a memory card.

People will be able to change the speed of the sound, which Iwata demonstrated as being useful in listening to a foreign language lesson, for example.

Nintendo also demonstrated new game software for its hit Wii home

console, including "Wii Music."

Players jiggle their remote controller to feel as though they are playing any of 60 musical instruments, including a drum set, sitar, saxophone and piano, although there are only 50 preprogrammed melodies. Users will be able to make those tunes play electronically from their Wii machines at their own speed and whim, and add personal touches, such as choosing accompanying instrumentation and genres such as jazz, reggae and rock.

Nintendo has sold 77.5 million Nintendo DS handheld devices worldwide, nearly 23 million in Japan, far outselling Sony Corp.’s rival offering, the PlayStation Portable, at 41 million globally - 10 million in Japan.

Howeverm the PSP has been challenging the DS lately - at least in Japan. For five months straight starting in March, PSP sales outpaced the DS in Japan, according to Tokyo-based Enterbrain, which publishes game magazines and tracks video game sales.

Iwata acknowledged that the pace of DS sales have been dwindling recently, and Nintendo was determined to reverse that with new offerings like the Nintendo DSi.

Nintendo Strikes Wii Hotel Deal

If you’re going to be staying at the Renaissance New York Hotel Times Square on business, you might need to have someone come get you when it’s time to leave for your meetings.

That’s because the hotel, and several others in the Marriott chain, will now be featuring Nintendo Wiis in their rooms, along with a selection of 20 games. Mass meeting delinquency is sure to follow.

According to a release from Nintendo on Tuesday, the Times Square hotel, along with Marriotts in five cities around the country, are going to begin stocking hotel rooms, or the lounge in one case, with specially outfitted Wiis and games like Mario Kart Wii, Super Mario Galaxy, and others.

And in case you’re wondering whether you have to pay by the hour, Nintendo said that guests would be able to purchase an all-you-can-eat package that would allow them to play all they want.

Further, the games would be pre-loaded and therefore will not require mucking about with game discs. Instead, just point your Wii remote at the TV and voila, Wii Fit will pop up for your enjoyment.

No word yet on how many hotel TVs will have to be replaced when guests throw the Wii remote through the screen while playing the tennis game in Wii Sports, or whether such guests will be on the hook for the replacement costs.

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A-ONE's Headline News
The Latest in Computer Technology News
Compiled by: Dana P. Jacobson

US Lawmakers Put Bailout Bill on Internet

US lawmakers have posted on the Internet their hastily-crafted draft legislation to rescue the country's troubled financial sector, saying the unusual step was taken in the spirit of openness.

The full text of the bill, more than 100 pages, is available at the websites of House Speaker Nancy Pelosi - http://speaker.house.gov - and the website of the House Financial Services Committee - http://financialservices.house.gov - though due to high demand both sites were experiencing overload late Sunday.

The draft bill, known as the Emergency Economic Stabilization Act of 2008, is online "for all Americans to see," Pelosi told reporters.

Presenting the bill for public consumption so quickly after it was agreed is an unusual move that Democratic leaders hope will project a sense of transparency.

At the earliest the House of Representatives will vote on the bill on Monday, and the Senate on Wednesday, lawmakers said.

"When this bill passes and is implemented all of the transactions related to this legislation will be on the Internet within 48 hours," said Pelosi.

"And that represents change," she said, adding: "That transparency, that oversight will be very important to the health of our economy."

House Web Site Overwhelmed as Bailout Bill Fails

The House Web site was overwhelmed Monday as millions of computer users sought information about the financial bailout bill rejected by the House.

"We haven't seen this much demand since the 9/11 commission report" was posted on the site in 2004, said Jeff Ventura, spokesman for the House chief administrative officer. "We're being overwhelmed with Web traffic about the bill."

Ventura said the Web site is working, but many computer users are getting the equivalent of a busy signal when they try to visit the site. Once users are on the site, it works at reduced speed.

"You have to keep trying and eventually you get in," he said.

Ventura said the slowdown is expected to last until Tuesday. n the meantime, technicians planned to work through the night to fortify the system.

"Our computer people aren’t going anywhere," Ventura said.

The House on Monday defeated a $700 billion emergency rescue for the nation’s financial system, and the Dow Jones industrials plunged nearly 800 points, the most for a single day.

Ventura estimated that millions of computer users went to the Web site to e-mail their representatives and to learn about the bill. He was unable to provide a more precise estimate.

The computer slowdown is affecting all House-member Web sites, he said. The site has an application that enables computer users to send e-mails to their representatives.

"It’s all tied into one system that is clearly being overloaded at this point," he said.

False Web Report Plays Havoc with Apple Stock

A false Internet report that Apple Inc’s Steve Jobs had suffered a heart attack briefly slammed his company’s stock on Friday and raised fresh questions about the delicate relationship between traditional and new media.

The posting on iReport.com - a citizen journalist site owned by Time Warner Inc’s CNN - is the most recent incident in which a faulty online report created brief, but wrenching, confusion among investors.

Apple quickly denied the report about its chief executive, but not before its stock dropped more than 2 percent, hitting a 17-month low of $94.65. It later recovered, climbing as much as 4 percent, before closing at $97.07, down 3.03 percent for the day.

The report claimed Jobs was rushed to the emergency room after suffering "a major heart attack." CNN later removed the posting from iReport.com and disabled the user’s account.

"iReport.com is an entirely user-generated site where the content is determined by the community," CNN said in a statement. "Content that does not comply with Community Guidelines will be removed. After the content in question was uploaded to iReport.com, the community brought it to our attention."

A spokeswoman added that CNN attempted to reach the user - based on information that was provided at registration - but was unsuccessful. The iReport.com site carries a disclaimer stating: "CNN makes no guarantees about the content or the coverage on iReport.com."

The incident highlights the risks involved with mainstream media organizations tapping into what is often referred to as "citizen journalism," the unedited and unfiltered presentation of news by non-professional reporters such as bloggers and eyewitnesses to events. Reuters is among those that have undertaken efforts in the area of citizen journalism.

While more news outlets are welcoming contributions from their audience,

so far there has been little agreement about standards, and they often rely on trust. To be sure, mainstream media has reported its share of incorrect news, and media experts said that it would be unfair to tarnish a vibrant movement in journalism based on one high-profile incident.

"Are we going to let one bad apple besmirch the entire orchard? That's ludicrous," said media consultant and Buzzmachine.com blogger Jeff Jarvis.

The report comes about a month after Jobs, who is often perceived as irreplaceable as Apple's leader, appeared thin, but jaunty as he introduced new iPod digital music players.

He walked on a stage in front of a screen that flashed "The reports of my death are greatly exaggerated" - a quotation borrowed from Mark Twain.

Before that event, investors had been concerned about the cancer survivor's health after he appeared thin at another product launch in June. In 2004, Jobs, 53, said he had undergone successful surgery to remove a rare type of pancreatic cancer.

Volatile trading in Apple's shares on Friday may also have been influenced by Barclays Capital's report that it slashed its price target on Apple to $135 a share from $180.

Jimmy Wales, founder of the user-edited encyclopedia Wikipedia that has emerged as the biggest reference site on the Web, said community-editing helps catch the vast majority of errors or outright falsehoods on such sites.

"Within the community people know each other and they know when to trust each other," Wales told Reuters. "Occasionally there are errors that slip through and make headlines."

"The paradox is that it is hard for CNN to move into citizen journalism because the errors are much more believable if it is from CNN than it would be from just any citizen journalist site," Wales said.

Last month, a nearly 6-year-old news story on the 2002 bankruptcy filing of UAL Corp resurfaced on the Internet, briefly crushing the airline's shares.

Microsoft, Washington State Sue Over 'Scareware' Pop-up Ads

Microsoft and the Attorney General's office in Washington state said on Monday they have filed a handful of lawsuits over pop-up ads that scare consumers into paying for software that supposedly fixes critical errors on a PC.

The lawsuit filed by the Attorney General's office alleges a Texas firm sent incessant pop-up ads that falsely claimed the computer had critical errors in its registry and directed people to a Web site where they could download free scanning software to find the problems.

The software then reports 43 critical problems and offers to sell a fix for $39.95. However, the software, dubbed "Registry Cleaner XP," does nothing but lull the consumer into a false sense of security, officials said.

It’s a "blatant rip off of consumers," Washington State Attorney General Rob McKenna said in a news conference. Consumers were "duped into downloading a fake scan (of the computer) and then duped into paying for software they don’t need."

The pop-ups take advantage of a function called Windows Messenger (not to be confused with Microsoft’s instant-messaging program Windows Live messenger) that was designed to allow network administrators to send alerts to Windows PCs on a network. The functionality was turned off in Windows XP Service Pack 2, said Richard Boscovich, senior attorney for Microsoft’s Internet Safety Enforcement Team.

The messages often would be displayed repeatedly, with one IP address receiving more than 200 in one day, the complaint alleges.

That lawsuit, which includes claims of misrepresentation, harassment, and high pressure sales, names as defendants Texas companies Alpha Red and Branch Software, and their owner James Reed McCreary. McCreary did not return a call seeking comment.

Microsoft filed five new lawsuits and amended two previous complaints against SMP Soft, all relating to programs that allegedly falsely alert consumers to problems on their computers and offer to sell software fixes. The programs listed include Scan & Repair, Antivirus 2009, MalwareCore, WinDefenderXPDefender.com and WinSpywareProtect. Most of the defendants are listed as "John Doe" because investigators do not yet know the identities of the people behind the programs.

The lawsuits were enabled by a broadening of Washington’s Computer Spyware Act, which was amended earlier this year to outlaw misrepresentation of the source of a message to a computer user in order to scare the person into installing software.

Consumers can file complaints on their own, officials said. Meanwhile, the defendants face penalties of up to $2,000 per violation plus restitution and attorney fees.

Microsoft has brought 17 spyware-related legal actions since the Computer Spyware Act was enacted in 2005.

To protect themselves against these and other threats, computer users should keep their operating system, antivirus, firewall and antispyware software updated, Microsoft said.

New UK Watchdog To Protect Children on the Web

Children will be protected from suicide websites, bullying and pornography by a new Internet watchdog, the British government said on Monday.

Home Secretary Jacqui Smith said it will be the biggest coalition of public and private bodies set up to safeguard young people online.

It will teach them about possible dangers, target illegal sites that contain harmful content and establish a code of conduct for sites that allow people to post their own video clips or messages.

The UK Council for Child Internet Safety (UKCCIS) will also tackle violent games and promote responsible advertising online.

"We are determined to do all we can to ensure that the Internet environment is safe for children to use," Smith said in a statement ahead of the watchdog's launch in central London.

Reporting directly to Prime Minister Gordon Brown, its 100 members include BT, Facebook, Google, Microsoft and Vodafone. A list of all the members is online: www.dcsf.gov.uk/pns/pnattach/20080215/2.html

Ministers have come under pressure to do more to tackle violent video games, bullying and sites that appear to glamorize suicide.

In March, a report for the government by psychologist Tanya Byron included a range of measures to protect children, including a call to set up a child safety council. Her review is online at www.dcsf.gov.uk/byronreview/

"The council will be a powerful union of some of our key players giving support to parents and guidance to children," she said.

Culture Secretary Andy Burnham said the watchdog would help ensure that "what is unacceptable offline should not be acceptable online."

Skype's China Spying Sparks Anger

Savvy Internet users in China began avoiding the version of Skype offered by its Chinese partner two years ago, but news it filtered and recorded text messages has sparked new worries about the global firm's commitment to privacy.

The U.S.-owned Web communications firm faces a backlash at home and in China for apparently allowing core principles to be compromised in order to meet the demands of Chinese censors, analysts warned.

"We may never know whether some of those people whose conversations were logged have gone to jail or have had their lives ruined in various ways as a result of this," said Rebecca MacKinnon, an Internet expert at Hong Kong University.

"This is a big blow to Skype's credibility, despite the fact that Skype executives are downplaying it as not such a big deal."

Skype, with its promises of total security and privacy, has long been popular with Chinese looking to keep their conversations away from the prying eyes of government censors.

But the eBay-owned firm had to apologize on Thursday after a report revealed that its Chinese service not only monitors text chats with sensitive keywords, which it had earlier admitted, but also stores them along with millions of personal user records on computers that could easily be accessed by anybody.

Skype added however that only messaging conversations where one or more people were using the Chinese software were affected.

The censorship provoked little surprise among some of China’s more knowledgeable Web users, however.

Suspicious of the software provided by TOM Online Inc., majority owners of the TOM-Skype joint-venture in China, they had already sought out the original version.

"We already knew that their software would not pass on messages with some words in them, so we understood they had some deal with the government and we avoided them," said Wang Lixiong, an author with dissident views.

Many spread the word over blogs and through other networks that the TOM-Skype version was not secure. The Skype homepage in China apparently redirected would-be users to download that version rather than the international one.

Still, there was outrage at the extent of a cooperation that many saw as another example of once-admired Western Internet giants bending their principles in order to do business in China.

"The problem with Skype is that they did more than what people expected. They over-satisfied the government," said Isaac Mao, one of China’s earliest and best known bloggers.

Yahoo Inc. has been widely criticized for its role in helping the Chinese government identify Shi Tao, a reporter accused of leaking state secrets abroad. He was jailed for 10 years in April 2007.

Google Inc., which has the corporate motto "Don’t be evil", upset some by launching a self-censoring Chinese site.

TOM said only that the company adhered to Chinese rules and regulations, and declined to answer any further questions.

Their defense was mocked by the people they aimed to monitor.

"We must interrogate you: the constitution stipulates that citizens have freedom of correspondence and of secret correspondence. Have you complied with this mother of laws?" one post on an online message board asked.

Author Wang said government controls on phones and other Internet programs left him with little choice but to take Skype at its word and continue using its original software, but even that has a security flaw that he worries about constantly.

He says the program allows one user to open their account on two separate computers, with no notification to the first.

"If our password is stolen, everything that we do on Skype can be seen or copied on another computer without us knowing. And in fact stealing a password is very easy for Internet police or hackers," he added.

Ballmer Offers More on ’Windows Cloud’

Microsoft CEO Steve Ballmer on Thursday promised it won't be long before the world gets to meet what he is calling "Windows Cloud" - something that acts like Windows but operates over the Internet.

"Just as we have an operating system for the PC, for the phone, and for the server, we need a new operating system that runs in the Internet," Ballmer said Thursday in a speech before France's CIGREF (Club Informatique des Grandes Entreprises Françaises). "I bet we'll call it Windows something. We're going to announce it in four weeks. We might even have a trademark by then. So, for today I'll call it Windows Cloud. And Windows Cloud will be a place where you can run arbitrary applications up in the Internet that runs .NET."

Ballmer first mentioned the "Windows Cloud" name in a speech in London earlier this week. Microsoft is expected to unveil "Windows Cloud" (whether it bears that name or not) at its Professional Developer Conference, which takes place the last week of October in Los Angeles.

Microsoft has already unveiled its Live Mesh, a consumer based service which synchronizes data across multiple devices. The software maker has promised that application developers will also be able to write Mesh-based applications and that the tools to do so will be detailed at the PDC. Windows Cloud appears to go significantly beyond that, however.

The move into cloud computing, Ballmer said, will require a shift in Microsoft's overall developer tools, Ballmer said on Friday. "Part of that means putting .Net in the browser, which we've done with our Silverlight technology," Ballmer said, according to a transcript posted on Microsoft's Web site. "And yet I don't think the whole world lives in a browser. PC applications have better user interface, and you can integrate them more. Browser applications run on non-Windows machines, and they're easier to manage. We need to bring the benefits of both of those things together on Windows, and through our Silverlight technology permit the targeting of other systems."

Ballmer also talked about desktop Windows at the event, first addressing Vista and then talking briefly about its successor, Windows 7.

"Windows Vista is a product where we made some very conscious choices for some very good reasons that have been very painful," Ballmer said. However, he said that the company has now shipped about 180 million copies of the OS.

"Deployments in large corporations are now ramping up quite nicely across the world, but in the enterprise I would say we are still earlier."

He then promised that Windows 7, as the company has been saying will be compatible with Vista.

"No more breaks," Ballmer said. "So, any work we're doing together with you or you're doing on your own to test your applications for Vista compatibility will also apply to Windows 7. We hope you choose to deploy with Vista, but all of that work is good, important work for the long term."

Microsoft plans to release a pre-beta version of Windows 7 to developers attending the PDC.

He also said that Vista has lived up to its target of being, statistically speaking, the most secure version of Windows to date.

Ballmer also talked about the shifting expectations people have for software, pointing to the MySpace generation as one that expects people to have social capabilities built-in to their software.

"The young people you hire today, they grow up on MySpace, Facebook, and instant messaging," Ballmer said. "They grow up with a fundamental notion that applications have knowledge of other people. In order for business applications to go that direction, we need to provide fundamental platform operating system services that really provide what I might call the social web or the social graph."

Microsoft Still Paying People To Search

Microsoft's latest effort to get people to use its search service is something called SearchPerks, which gives people points for using the search engine that can later be redeemed for prizes.

Users who agree to download a small program to track their usage get one "ticket" per day for every Live Search query, up to 25 per day. The program runs through April, at which point users can "cash in" the tickets that they get and trade them in for prizes or donate them to a charity.

It's the latest in a series of financial incentive-related projects from Redmond, joining such efforts as Live Search Club, Search and Give, and Live Search Cashback, a program Microsoft introduced in May.

The latest project doesn't just require one to use Microsoft's search engine, however. At least for now, it also requires Microsoft's browser (Internet Explorer 6.0 or higher) as well as a Windows PC. Microsoft said those latter restrictions are not necessarily permanent.

"At this time, SearchPerks is a limited promotion, though we remain open to expending availability of the promotion to different browsers and operating systems based on consumer interest," Microsoft said.

There's also the broader question of what it says about Live Search overall that Microsoft has to keep coming up with gimmicks to get people to try it. Not to mention the fact that Microsoft has continued to struggle to make inroads on Google in overall share, promotions notwithstanding. According to figures recently released by ComScore, Google increased its share of the U.S. search market in August - it's at 63 percent - while Yahoo and Microsoft both slipped a bit, to 19.6 percent and 8.3 percent respectively.

In an interview, Live Search Senior Director Frederick Savoye said that the new business models, as Microsoft likes to refer to these programs, are just one part of a three-prong strategy that includes continued improvements in core search as well as in vertical search, or "simplifying key tasks" in Microsoft parlance.

Microsoft has seen mixed results with its incentive programs. Live Search Club, for example, gave Microsoft an initial boost, but its gains appear to be directly tied to its level of incentives. With Live Search Cashback, Microsoft said it has seen some advertisers boost their Live Search spend. eBay, in particular, is spending 50 percent more on Live

Search thanks to Cashback, which Microsoft says offers significantly higher conversion rates than traditional search.

On the broader goal of boosting Microsoft's share of the commercial search business, Savoye said, Cashback has yet to make a meaningful shift in share. "We haven't seen it move significantly yet," Savoye said.

PR Director Whitney Burk said that programs such as SearchPerks are still needed to introduce people to Microsoft's search product.

"We know we have some challenges with the brand and perception," Burk said. "Simple awareness is still a challenge for us."

People can sign up for SearchPerks through the end of the year, or until Microsoft reaches its target of 250,000 participants. Rewards can be earned through April, though Microsoft may decide to extend or expand the program.

In pilot testing, Microsoft said it saw those in the program perform three times the number of searches they had been doing. Savoye noted that in the airline industry, for example, loyalty programs have become a standard part of doing business.

"Over the long-term these programs have changed people's behavior," he said.

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